

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN GREECE

A Shifting Policy Landscape with Human Consequences

In recent years, Greece — like much of the European Union — has prioritised investment in border management over sustaining services for those seeking international protection. While security and coordination remain important, this shift has left significant gaps in the legal and humanitarian response.

As access to legal aid, housing, interpretation, and basic assistance diminishes, vulnerable people are increasingly left without the support they are entitled to under European and national law. The system is under strain — and those who most need protection are paying the price.

Sea Arrivals and Border Management on the Aegean Route

From January to 30 June 2025, a total of 19,024 people arrived in Greece seeking asylum: 17,000 arrived by sea to the islands of Greece and 2,024 via land borders. Weekly fluctuations continued; between mid-May and mid-June, 432 people arrived on Chios alone, while 450 were transferred off the island. (Source: UNHCR statistics)

Reports of forced returns — or “pushbacks” — continue. These involve people being intercepted at sea and returned to Turkish waters without being given a chance to apply for asylum. Though widely documented by civil society, there are no official statistics. (For more detailed information: www.aegeanboatreport.org)

Arrivals on the Mediterranean Route

Crete and the nearby island of Gavdos have seen a surge in arrivals in 2024–2025, particularly via Libya — an even more dangerous route than that across the Aegean from Turkey. Over 7,000 people seeking international protection arrived in the first half of 2025 — more than six times the number recorded in 2023. Many are from Egypt, Syria, and Sudan, including unaccompanied minors.

Crete lacks a Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) or a Closed Controlled Access Centre (CCAC). Arrivals are temporarily housed in unsuitable and overcrowded facilities such as the Agia Exhibition Center in Chania, which lacks proper sanitation and security. After a short stay, they are transferred to the mainland, often to centres such as ***Malakasa RIC, one of only two Centres where new arrivals can register their claims for international protection on the mainland.***

Malakasa is now under severe strain. In March 2025 alone, nearly 200 unaccompanied minors arrived in a single week. By late March, 270 children were hosted in the designated Safe Area, forcing some to be housed outside fenced protection zones due to capacity limits. ***Overcrowding has led to delays in registration, medical checks, and psychosocial support — compounding the risks faced by vulnerable individuals.***

Although a Regional Asylum Office operates in Heraklion, its capacity is limited. Local authorities have publicly called for the establishment of appropriate reception infrastructure on the island to avoid the continued reliance on inadequate temporary shelters and transfers.

In June, the Greek Prime Minister and the newly appointed Migration Minister announced that navy frigates would patrol near the Libyan coast to deter departures. It remains unclear whether such operations would take place in international waters or with Libya's formal cooperation.

Evictions and Housing Crisis

In May 2025, a verbal order from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum mandated the eviction of recognised refugees and rejected asylum seekers from camps, with no support for alternative housing. This has triggered widespread homelessness. A joint statement by 31 NGOs calls for immediate reversal of the decision and the establishment of a humane housing framework.

Reports of violent evictions and people being locked out of their containers incurring loss of their belongings are common in a few of the CCACs.

The IOM-administered HELIOS programme — initially launched to support integration and housing — has been widely criticised as convoluted and inaccessible. A new version, Helios+, launched in May 2025, remains in its early stages and underfunded. Few applicants report successfully accessing the programme, and no scalable alternative housing model is currently in place.

Cash Assistance Programme Collapses

Cash assistance payments — a legal entitlement under both EU and Greek law — were suspended from May to August 2024, resumed temporarily until March 2025, and now remain uncertain. The implementing partner, CRS, ceased operations on 30 June 2025. No replacement has been announced. Legal obligations remain unmet, and vulnerable people are left without essential support.

Interpreter Services Severely Disrupted

Interpreter services within the Greek Asylum Service have not fully recovered since METAdrassi, the primary provider of interpretation services, withdrew in May 2024 due to long delays in payment by the Ministry. EUAA interpreters were reduced in late 2024, and no permanent solution has been implemented. Despite the availability of funds from the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) 2021–2027, no concrete measures have been taken to reinstate a functional interpretation system. ***Communication barriers continue to delay asylum interviews and deny access to essential services.***

Wildfire Evacuation at Vial CCAC (Chios)

A wildfire in June forced the evacuation of all residents of the Vial camp on Chios. They spent the night in a stadium under challenging conditions. The camp has not yet reopened.

Legislative Proposals on Returns

Draft legislation under consultation proposes extending detention of undocumented individuals to 24 months and abolishing humanitarian permits. Civil society is closely monitoring the implications.

New Migration Minister Appointed

Thanos Plevris, a hardline lawmaker known for his anti-migrant stance, was appointed Minister for Migration and Asylum on 30 June 2025. His appointment signals continued restrictive migration policies.

For sources and references, please visit our website www.assist-ch.org